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# ENG 3001-005: Advanced Composition

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**English 3001: Advanced Composition/Autumn 2001****Dr. Dagni Bredesen**

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Email: [cf dab@eiu.edu](mailto:cf dab@eiu.edu)**Course Description:**

Oscar Wilde once observed that “In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.” Style captivates, persuades, amuses, angers, annoys, bores, even intimidates. It is inevitable and omnipresent—not something you “have” or do not “have.” Nevertheless, for many writers, style is perceived of as the most elusive part of writing—a matter of talent, not a skill that can be learned. And yet style is simply the accumulated effect of routine and even mundane choices. We choose to use a particular word out of range of possible ones. We decide that one idea ‘sounds better’ if we express it in a short and simple sentence, while another idea ‘seems right’ within a long and complex one. In total, each of these choices creates a style, and every style creates an imagined audience for the text and a projected persona for the writer. This course provides the experienced writer with an opportunity to develop a vocabulary for thinking about and analyzing prose style. At the same time, writers will be encouraged to experiment with and refine their use of style as a tool of argumentation and persuasion.

As an ‘advanced’ class, we will focus more on form than content, examining the various types of choices and rhetorical devices in a diverse range of expository prose. Our emphasis through out this class will be on defining specific kinds of choices that inform style and paying attention to those choices in our own writing. We will draw extensively on work you have already done. You will be asked to evaluate and profile your own writing, and use material from previously written papers (preferably from upper division English courses) as a foundation in a number of exercises and assignments.

**Course Overview:**

This class requires both a solid foundation in the basics of argument and exposition as well as a willingness to engage with professional and peer writing on the level of the paragraph, the sentence, and the word. The first half of this class will consist of a series of short exercises and papers that ask you to analyze, imitate, experiment with, and revise samples of professional writing reflecting a range of purposes, personas, and audiences. The second half of this course will focus on an extensive final project that may be 1) an independent seminar paper on a topic of your choice (chosen in consultation with the instructor) or it may be a joint assignment with an English class you are currently enrolled in. This latter option requires the written consent of the professor in the other class and may be subject to certain guidelines and restrictions.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Think critically about the components of “good” writing, especially style.
2. Experiment with different styles, rhetorical purposes, and audiences.
3. Improve editorial skills, especially in the area of grammar and style.

4. Develop strong skills in revision.
5. Develop more varied writing styles.
6. Produce a substantial and polished final essay that could serve as a writing sample for employers or graduate and professional programs.

**Required Texts: Available through EIU's Textbook Rental System:**

- Diana Hacker, ed. *A Writer's Reference* 4<sup>th</sup> ed.
- Joseph Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*

**Supplementary Texts:**

You will need a very good grammar guide. Reviewing certain rules of use will help you negotiate certain chapters in Williams and in other texts we will be reading. More pragmatically, there will be announced quizzes on specific grammar and mechanics topics (for instance, modifiers or 'advanced' punctuation issues).

**Other Materials:**

- A notebook with dividers for each of the papers. This should be different from the notebook in which you keep your class notes.
- a "**Commonplace Book:**"  
Developing a heightened sense of rhetorical styles requires of you some reflection on what kind of styles you already gravitate toward. The commonplace book is a great way to collect examples of prose that you find compelling and interesting, and reflect on what patterns might exist in your own 'taste' in prose. Set aside a small bound blank book, a spiral notebook, or a loose-leaf binder. Copy into it any passages or quotations that you come across (in any context, not just in this class) that you would like to remember and record. Be sure to record the source. Then write a short response identifying why the passage strikes you as interesting or worth copying down. You will use this book as raw material for several short assignments.

**Participation:**

Active engagement and a willingness to work collaboratively with your peers are extremely important to your success in this class. You will spend a great deal of time working together in peer groups and in small tutorial sessions with me. Participation includes: evaluations of peer writing, class discussions, preparedness, group work, and tutorial groups.

**Grades:**

|                      |     |                  |     |
|----------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Short Assignments    | 30% | Quizzes          | 10% |
| Final project        | 35% | Participation    | 10% |
| Second Revised Essay | 10% | Commonplace book | 5%  |